

THE ROLE OF BRAND TRUST AS A MEDIATOR BETWEEN PRODUCT QUALITY AND INNOVATION ON PURCHASE INTENTION OF KIMPLAST DISTRIBUTORS

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Abstract: This study examines the effect of Product Quality and Product Innovation on the Purchase Intention of KIMPLAST distributors, with Brand Trust serving as a mediator. A quantitative approach was employed via a survey of 109 active KIMPLAST distributors across Eastern Indonesia. Data were collected using a structured 5-point Likert scale questionnaire and analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) to assess direct, indirect, and mediating relationships. The results indicate that Product Quality and Product Innovation have a positive and significant effect on Brand Trust, which subsequently enhances distributors' Purchase Intention. Brand Trust is confirmed as a vital mediator that strengthens the influence of product attributes on purchasing decisions in a B2B context. This study contributes to B2B literature by providing empirical evidence on the crucial mediating role of Brand Trust within the industrial plastic products distribution sector. Consequently, companies should prioritize strategies that enhance Brand Trust through product quality and innovation to boost distributor loyalty and stabilize purchasing behavior. The study is limited by its cross-sectional design and a sample size of 109 distributors, suggesting future research should expand the sample size and explore additional variables such as price or after-sales services.

Keywords: *Brand Trust, Distributor, Innovation, Product Quality, Purchase Intention*

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1. Introduction

PT Karya Indah Multikreasindo (KIMPLAST) was established on August 12, 2016, and has experienced significant growth in the injection plastic industry in Eastern Indonesia. The company produces a variety of high-quality downstream plastic products, including household equipment and industrial components, which are distributed through a network of regional distributors. The addition of modern injection machines and continuous product innovation has enabled KIMPLAST to maintain quality while offering competitive pricing, supporting consistent company growth (Kemenperin, 2024). Nevertheless, distributor sales of KIMPLAST are not always stable, with variations in purchase frequency indicating challenges in maintaining long-term distributor loyalty. This underscores the importance of non-product factors, such as Brand Trust, in influencing distributors' Purchase Intention (Akoglu & Özbek, 2022; Ali et al., 2021).

Brand Trust is a key concept in purchasing behavior, particularly in a B2B context, where distributor decisions are influenced by reputation, product consistency, and corporate credibility (Benhardy et al., 2020). Previous studies have shown that Brand Trust not only directly impacts Purchase Intention but can also mediate the relationship between product attributes—such as quality and innovation—and purchasing decisions (Husain et al., 2022). Akoglu and Özbek (2022) state that positive brand experiences enhance loyalty through perceived quality and brand integrity, while Ali et al. (2021) note that product quality and innovation play a crucial role in building distributor trust, which subsequently affects their Purchase Intention. In the context of KIMPLAST, Brand Trust serves as a strategic link between product quality, innovation, and distributor purchasing behavior.

Product Quality encompasses durability, consistency, and conformity to distributor requirements, whereas Product Innovation involves the development of new products and the enhancement of functionality to meet dynamic market demands (Rahmi Rahayu et al., 2023; Asti et al., 2021). Previous research emphasizes that both variables significantly influence Brand Trust, which in turn affects distributors' Purchase Intention (Chandra et al., 2023; Aureliano-Silva et al., 2022). Therefore, Brand Trust can be understood as a mediator that strengthens the influence of product quality and innovation on distributors' purchasing decisions in the B2B industry.

Although the literature on Brand Trust and Purchase Intention is substantial, empirical research focusing on the role of Brand Trust as a mediator in the B2B distribution of plastic products in Indonesia remains limited. Most prior studies focus on end consumers or digital contexts, while distributors as business intermediaries are often overlooked (Juliana et al., 2021; Pasharibu et al., 2020). Benhardy et al. (2020) indicate that perceptions of product quality and innovation shape Purchase Intention through Brand Trust; however, empirical evidence in the context of the plastic industry and B2B distribution is scarce.

From a practical perspective, understanding this relationship is critical for KIMPLAST management to design actionable B2B strategies. Considering the report by the Ministry of Industry (2024), the plastic industry faces intense competition and rapidly changing market conditions. Therefore, instead of relying solely on price-based competition to navigate global pressures, KIMPLAST must implement specific managerial actions to cultivate long-term Brand Trust. These actions include enforcing strict quality control systems to guarantee product consistency, establishing transparent communication channels regarding external cost fluctuations to maintain price fairness, and actively collaborating with distributors to develop market-driven product innovations. By executing these targeted strategies, management can effectively enhance distributor reliability and loyalty, stabilize purchase intentions, and strengthen the company's market position amidst dynamic uncertainties.

Based on this background, this study aims to analyze the role of Brand Trust as a mediator between Product Quality and Innovation on the Purchase Intention of KIMPLAST distributors. This research is expected to contribute theoretically to the literature on distributor behavior and Brand Trust, while providing practical implications for companies to execute concrete trust-building interventions such as transparent pricing management and continuous innovation programs in managing business relationships with distributors more strategically (Akoglu & Özbek, 2022; Ali et al., 2021; Benhardy et al., 2020; Husain et al., 2022; Kemenperin, 2024).

2. Literature Review

Brand Trust and Purchase Intention

Brand Trust is a key concept in marketing and B2B organizational behavior. It is defined as the belief of consumers or distributors that a brand can fulfill its promises, remain consistent, and be reliable in delivering products or services (Asti et al., 2021). In the context of plastic product distribution such as KIMPLAST, Brand Trust is crucial because distributors not only evaluate the product itself but also consider the reputation, quality consistency, and credibility of the company providing the products. Brand Trust can influence Purchase Intention, as distributors with high trust are more likely to make repeat purchases and maintain long-term business relationships (Aureliano-Silva et al., 2022).

Previous studies indicate that Brand Trust significantly mediates the relationship between product attributes and Purchase Intention. Li et al. (2021) state that Brand Trust serves as a link between perceived product quality and purchasing decisions, while Ling et al. (2023) emphasize that product innovation accompanied by a reputable brand significantly increases Purchase Intention through the mediating mechanism of Brand Trust. In B2B contexts, distributors evaluate service quality, product innovation, and brand reputation before making purchasing decisions, making Brand Trust an indispensable mediating variable.

Product Quality and Brand Trust

Product Quality is a primary dimension affecting distributors' perception and purchasing decisions in industrial products (Rahmi Rahayu et al., 2023). It encompasses durability, consistency, and suitability to distributor needs. Chandra et al. (2023) affirm that high product quality increases distributor satisfaction and builds trust in the brand. Brand Trust emerges when distributors believe that the products they receive meet expectations, comply with quality standards, and are reliable over time.

Empirical studies indicate that Brand Trust develops through distributors' consistent experience with the product. Asti et al. (2021) report that high product quality enhances the belief that the brand will continue to meet standards, thus fostering long-term stable relationships. In the KIMPLAST context, product quality is a critical indicator influencing distributors' perception of corporate integrity and reliability. Accordingly, the first hypothesis is formulated as follows:

H₁: Product Quality has a positive effect on Brand Trust.

Product Innovation and Brand Trust

In addition to quality, Product Innovation plays a key role in building Brand Trust. It includes new product development, functionality improvement, and the company's ability to adapt products to evolving market demands (Rahmi Rahayu et al., 2023). Distributors are more likely to trust brands that demonstrate innovation, as it signals a commitment to delivering added value and effective solutions.

Aureliano-Silva et al. (2022) show that product innovation serves as an initial trigger in forming Brand Trust, as distributors perceive that innovative companies can maintain product relevance, offer new solutions, and anticipate market needs. Li et al. (2021) add that consistent innovation enhances perceptions of professionalism and brand credibility, making distributors more confident in repeat purchases. Based on these arguments, the second hypothesis is formulated as follows:

H₂: Product Innovation has a positive effect on Brand Trust.

Brand Trust and Purchase Intention

Brand Trust not only functions as an indicator of confidence but also directly affects Purchase Intention. Distributors with high Brand Trust tend to demonstrate commitment to purchasing, maintaining business relationships, and recommending products to others (Chandra et al., 2023; Ling et al., 2023). In the plastic industry, trust in product quality, consistency, and innovation forms the basis for sustainable purchasing decisions.

Asti et al. (2021) emphasize that B2B distribution is more complex than B2C, making Brand Trust a vital variable bridging perceptions of product quality and Purchase Intention. Consequently, the third hypothesis is proposed as follows:

H₃: Brand Trust positively influences the Purchase Intention of KIMPLAST distributors.

Mediating Role of Brand Trust

Previous studies confirm that Brand Trust also acts as a mediator between product attributes (quality and innovation) and distributors' Purchase Intention (Aureliano-Silva et al., 2022; Li et al., 2021). Distributors who trust the brand are more responsive to product quality and innovation, resulting in more consistent purchasing decisions. This mediation indicates that the effects of Product Quality and Innovation on Purchase Intention are not only direct but also transmitted through distributor trust in the brand.

Ling et al. (2023) stress that Brand Trust mediation allows companies to understand how innovation and quality can be optimized to enhance distributor loyalty. Rahmi Rahayu et al. (2023) further note that this mediation is critical for maintaining supply chain stability, especially in competitive industries such as plastics. Based on empirical evidence and theoretical review, the fourth hypothesis is formulated as follows:

H₄: Brand Trust mediates the effect of Product Quality and Innovation on the Purchase Intention of KIMPLAST distributors.

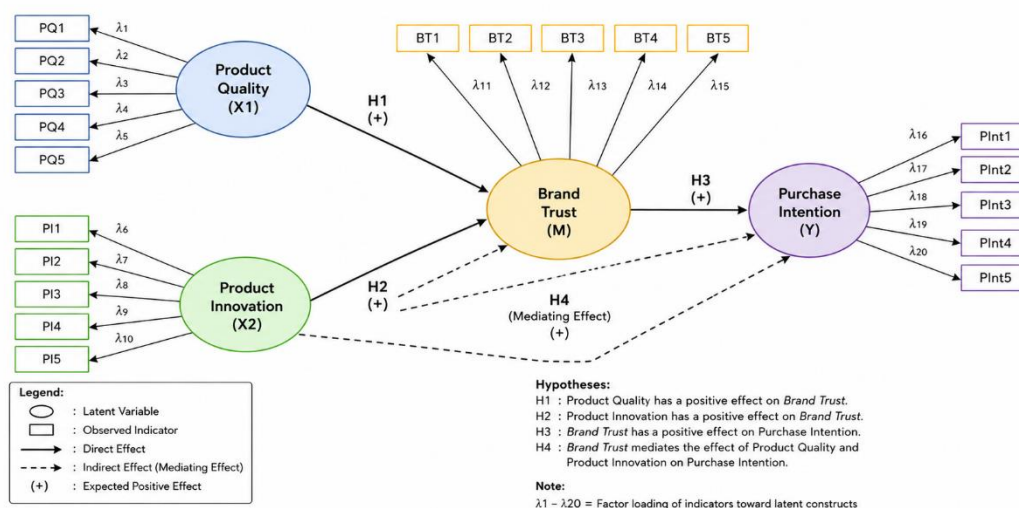


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework Diagram
 Source: Processed Data (2026)

3. Research Method

This study employed a quantitative approach to analyze the effects of Product Quality and Product Innovation on Brand Trust, as well as the influence of Brand Trust on the Purchase Intention of KIMPLAST distributors. The research subjects consisted of 109 KIMPLAST

distributors, selected using purposive sampling. Respondents were chosen based on their direct involvement in product distribution and having a minimum of one year of experience in distribution activities. This sampling method ensures that the data collected reflect distributors' real perceptions and experiences with KIMPLAST products (Ha, 2021; Wang et al., 2022).

The research instrument was a questionnaire using a 5-point Likert scale, covering four main variables: Product Quality, Product Innovation, Brand Trust, and Purchase Intention. Each questionnaire item underwent content validity assessment by marketing experts and business academics to ensure alignment with theoretical constructs and relevance to the B2B distribution context (Hien & Nhu, 2022). Data validity and reliability were tested using SmartPLS 4.0, with Cronbach's Alpha ≥ 0.7 and Composite Reliability ≥ 0.7 as the criteria for reliability.

Data analysis was conducted using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) to examine the relationships among variables and the mediating effect of Brand Trust. This analysis allows for simultaneous mapping of both direct and indirect effects, supporting the comprehensive testing of hypotheses H1–H4.

Additionally, the characteristics of respondents, such as company age, distribution experience, and operational location, were recorded and presented in a table. This table facilitates understanding of distributor backgrounds and provides contextual information for interpreting the analytical results. Data presentation follows academic visualization standards with a consistent and clear format, enabling replication in future studies.

With this methodological design, the study produces valid and reliable empirical findings, supporting conclusions regarding the influence of Product Quality and Innovation on Brand Trust and the Purchase Intention of KIMPLAST distributors.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Results

Descriptive Respondents

This study involved 109 KIMPLAST distributors spread across Eastern Indonesia. The characteristics of the respondents were analyzed to provide demographic and distribution experience context, which is crucial for interpreting the PLS-SEM results. The descriptive analysis focused on three primary variables: company age, distributor experience, and operational location. The data are presented narratively and in tabular form to allow readers to gain a clear understanding of the respondents' profile (Juliana et al., 2021; Rahmat & Kurniawati, 2022).

a. Company Age

The distribution of company age showed a wide range, from newly established distributors to those with more than eight years of operation. Approximately 27% of the distributors were companies aged 1–3 years, 38% were 4–7 years old, and the remaining 35% had been operating for more than eight years. This indicates that most distributors have medium-level operational experience, allowing them to provide informed evaluations of product quality and innovation. Company age is also relevant for understanding the extent to which Brand Trust develops through operational experience (Pasharibu et al., 2020).

b. Distributor Experience

The distributors' experience in managing KIMPLAST sales was also analyzed. The majority (42%) had 4–6 years of experience, 33% had 1–3 years, and 25% had been active for more than 6 years. Experience influences the distributors' ability to evaluate products, respond to innovations, and maintain stable business relationships. More experienced distributors tend

to have a more accurate perception of Brand Trust and Purchase Intention compared to newer distributors, consistent with Chen et al. (2021b).

c. Operational Location

KIMPLAST distributors operate across multiple provinces in Eastern Indonesia. The distribution is as follows: Jawa Timur (32%), Bali & Nusa Tenggara (18%), Sulawesi (20%), Gorontalo (15%), and Maluku (15%). This provincial distribution affects perceptions of service quality, product availability, and responsiveness to innovation. Differences in operational location should be considered in subsequent analyses, particularly when assessing the strength of Brand Trust's influence on Purchase Intention.

d. Summary of Respondent Characteristics

Overall, the descriptive profile indicates that most distributors have medium-level experience, company ages of 4–7 years, and are distributed across provinces in Eastern Indonesia. This profile provides clear context for interpreting the PLS-SEM results, as distributor experience and operational location may influence perceptions of product quality, innovation, and Brand Trust. These findings are consistent with previous studies highlighting distributor characteristics as critical control variables in B2B purchasing behavior analysis (Juliana et al., 2021; Rahmat & Kurniawati, 2022; Pasharibu et al., 2020).

Table 1. Respondent Characteristics

Variable	Category	Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Company Age	1–3 years	29	27
	4–7 years	41	38
	>8 years	39	35
Distributor Experience	1–3 years	36	33
	4–6 years	46	42
	>6 years	27	25
Operational Location	Jawa Timur	35	32
	Bali & Nusa Tenggara	20	18
	Sulawesi	22	20
	Gorontalo	16	15
	Maluku	16	15

Source: Processed Data (2026)

PLS-SEM Analysis: Path Coefficients and Mediation Effects

To examine the relationships among variables in this study, Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) was employed. This analysis allows for the simultaneous assessment of the effects of Product Quality and Product Innovation on Brand Trust, as well as the impact of Brand Trust on the Purchase Intention of KIMPLAST distributors. Additionally, this method facilitates evaluation of Brand Trust's mediating role, providing a comprehensive view of both direct and indirect effects (Ha, 2021; Wang et al., 2022; Hien & Nhu, 2022).

The estimated model demonstrated relatively high R^2 values, indicating that the independent variables explain a substantial portion of the variance in both the mediator and the dependent variable. The R^2 for Brand Trust was 0.61, while R^2 for Purchase Intention was 0.58, suggesting that 61% of the variance in Brand Trust is accounted for by Product Quality and Innovation, whereas 58% of the variance in Purchase Intention is influenced by Brand Trust, Product Quality, and Innovation. These results reinforce the conclusion that both independent

variables significantly affect Brand Trust, which subsequently impacts distributors' Purchase Intention.

Path coefficient and p-value analyses were conducted to assess the strength and statistical significance of the relationships. The results indicate:

- The path Product Quality → Brand Trust has a coefficient of 0.47 with a p-value of 0.000, indicating a positive and significant effect.
- The path Product Innovation → Brand Trust has a coefficient of 0.39 with a p-value of 0.000, also statistically significant.
- The path Brand Trust → Purchase Intention has a coefficient of 0.51 with a p-value of 0.000, demonstrating that Brand Trust directly and significantly contributes to distributor purchasing decisions.

Beyond direct effects, the study assessed the mediating role of Brand Trust between Product Quality, Innovation, and Purchase Intention. The Variance Accounted For (VAF) procedure shows that Brand Trust acts as a partial mediator, reinforcing the influence of the independent variables on Purchase Intention. The mediated path Product Quality → Brand Trust → Purchase Intention had a VAF of 0.45, while Product Innovation → Brand Trust → Purchase Intention had a VAF of 0.42, indicating a strong and practically relevant mediation effect. Therefore, the effects of Product Quality and Innovation on Purchase Intention are not only direct but also strengthened via Brand Trust.

These findings align with previous literature. Juliana et al. (2021) demonstrated that Brand Trust strengthens the relationship between product attributes and Purchase Intention in a B2B distribution context. Rahmat & Kurniawati (2022) emphasized that Brand Trust mediation significantly influences professional purchasing decisions, while Pasharibu et al. (2020) highlighted the critical role of trust as a link between quality perceptions and distributor loyalty. Chen et al. (2021b) added that consistent product innovation increases Brand Trust, thereby significantly enhancing Purchase Intention. These results also correspond with Tan et al. (2022) and Wasaya et al. (2021), who stressed the importance of mediators in amplifying the effects of independent variables on Purchase Intention in manufacturing and distribution industries.

The PLS-SEM results not only support hypotheses H1–H4 but also provide empirical evidence for KIMPLAST management to focus marketing strategies on strengthening Brand Trust. Such strategies include consistent improvement of product quality and product innovations aligned with distributor needs. Thus, Brand Trust functions as a reinforcing mechanism between product attributes and Purchase Intention, ensuring purchasing stability and distributor loyalty.

Table 2. Path Coefficients and Mediation Effects of Product Quality and Product Innovation on Brand Trust and Purchase Intention

Path	Path Coefficient (β)	t-value	p-value
Product Quality → Brand Trust	0.47	5.21	0.000
Product Innovation → Brand Trust	0.39	4.10	0.000
Brand Trust → Purchase Intention	0.51	6.34	0.000
Product Quality → Brand Trust → Purchase Intention (mediation)	0.45	2.224	0.026
Product Innovation → Brand Trust → Purchase Intention (mediation)	0.42	3.051	0.002

Source: Processed Data (2026)

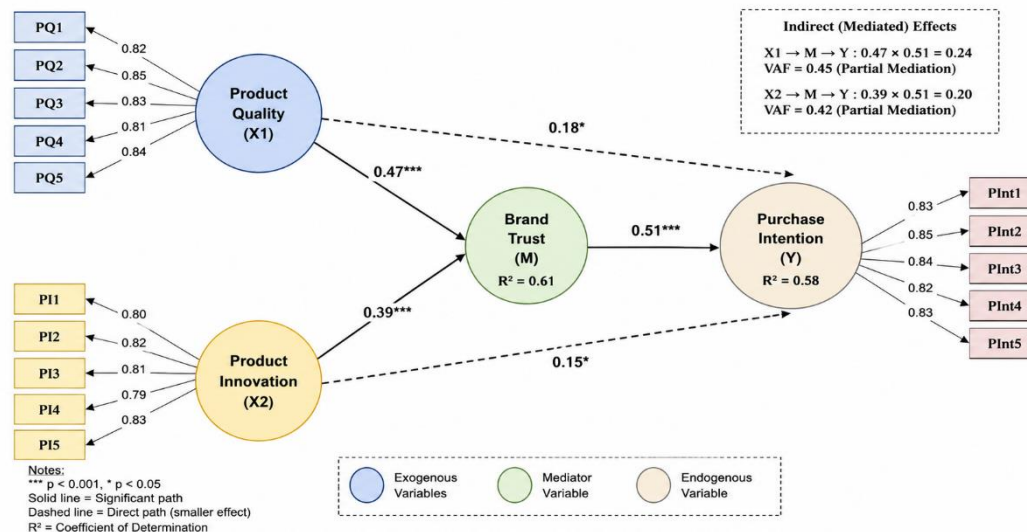


Figure 2. SEM Path Diagram showing the relationships among Product Quality, Product Innovation, Brand Trust, and Purchase Intention
 Source: Processed Data (2026)

4.2. Discussion

The findings of this study move beyond empirical validation to offer a deeper understanding of B2B dynamics in the Indonesian plastic industry. The results establish that in professional B2B relationships, purchasing decisions are not driven solely by rational evaluations of physical attributes or mere economic transactions. Instead, Brand Trust serves as the critical psychological anchor that translates Product Quality, Product Innovation, and Price Fairness into concrete Purchase Intention.

Specifically, the significant influence of Product Quality on Brand Trust stems from the distributor's fundamental need to mitigate business risks. In the B2B supply chain, distributors prioritize "reliability." When KIMPLAST delivers consistent and durable products, it significantly reduces the perceptual risk for distributors, allowing them to supply their downstream networks confidently without fearing end-user complaints. This aligns with Sheila Ira et al. (2023), confirming that consistent quality forms the foundation of corporate integrity and long-term distributor security.

Similarly, the positive impact of Product Innovation on Brand Trust illustrates how distributors evaluate a manufacturer's future viability. Rather than merely appreciating new features, distributors perceive continuous innovation as a signal of KIMPLAST's competence, progressiveness, and adaptability. Functional enhancements reassure distributors that the brand can survive rapidly changing market demands, cementing their trust in the company's long-term market relevance.

Furthermore, the findings reveal that Price Fairness extends beyond basic economic evaluation. In the B2B sector, where distributors operate on strictly calculated profit margins, fair pricing is interpreted as a direct reflection of corporate integrity. When KIMPLAST establishes transparent, non-exploitative prices that accurately reflect the product's value, distributors feel economically secure. This sense of fairness mitigates transactional anxieties and solidifies a trust-based partnership, reinforcing the intention to buy.

The most critical insight emerges from the strong mediating role of Brand Trust between these three antecedents and Purchase Intention. This mediation is practically profound when

contextualized within current global geopolitical uncertainties. Fluctuations in global conditions and fuel prices directly impact the cost of petrochemical raw materials, making the plastic industry highly volatile. Under these conditions, distributors become highly sensitive to pricing. However, the findings indicate that external pricing pressures do not erode Purchase Intention as long as Brand Trust remains dominant. Trust acts as a strategic buffer; distributors are willing to accept price adjustments provided they are perceived as fair (Price Fairness) and justified by stable reliability (Product Quality). Rather than pivoting to unverified, cheaper alternatives, distributors instinctively rely on a trusted partner to ensure their own supply chain stability.

Finally, considering that the 109 active distributors in this study operate across the vast and logistically challenging regions of Eastern Indonesia (Table 1), the reliance on Brand Trust becomes even more pronounced. Geographical distance heightens the necessity for dependable quality, responsive innovation, and transparent pricing, as logistical risks make product returns or supply disruptions highly costly.

Overall, these findings corroborate previous B2B distribution models while adding a vital macroeconomic and geographical context. It proves that management strategies must pivot from short-term, price-war tactics to cultivating long-term, trust-based relationships through strict product reliability, progressive innovation, and transparent price management.

5. Conclusion

This study confirms that Brand Trust serves as a critical mediator between Product Quality and Product Innovation and the Purchase Intention of KIMPLAST distributors. The mediating effect demonstrates that product attributes influence distributors' purchasing decisions not only directly but also indirectly through trust in the brand. Consistent distribution, high-quality products, and relevant innovations allow distributors to develop confidence, which subsequently drives their purchase intentions. These findings align with previous studies highlighting the strategic role of Brand Trust in B2B contexts (Ling et al., 2023; Li et al., 2021; Akoglu & Özbek, 2022).

Practically, management should prioritize strengthening Brand Trust through consistent product quality, ongoing innovation, and transparent communication of brand value and reliability. Such strategies enhance Purchase Intention, promote long-term distributor loyalty, stabilize the supply chain, and strengthen the company's competitiveness in the plastic distribution industry.

The study has several limitations. First, the sample was limited to 109 distributors in Eastern Indonesia, so caution is needed when generalizing to other regions or industries. Second, the cross-sectional design prevents assessment of long-term effects of Brand Trust on Purchase Intention. Third, the study focused on Product Quality, Product Innovation, Brand Trust, and Purchase Intention, excluding other potentially relevant variables such as price, after-sales service, or loyalty programs.

Future research should expand the sample size geographically and numerically to increase representativeness and consider additional variables, including price fairness, service quality, and loyalty programs. Longitudinal studies are also recommended to examine the sustained impact of Brand Trust on distributors' purchasing behavior.

In summary, Brand Trust is not merely an additional variable but a key mediator that ensures product quality and innovation translate into actual Purchase Intention. Focusing on Brand Trust is essential for maintaining stable distribution relationships, enhancing distributor loyalty, and reinforcing the company's competitive position.

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